THE MINISTER OF FINANCE AND MINISTER OF COMPANY AFFAIRS (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM) : (a) and (b). Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has reported that they have received a representation from Tea Association of India stating, inter-alia, that banks have lost interest in financing schemes for development of tea plantation on account of stoppage of refinance from National Bank for Agriculture & Rural Development (NABARD) with effect from January, 1996.

NABARD, has, reported that considering the representations received from various quarters, it has decided to allocate Rs. 2.5 crores for sanction of new tea schemes in West Bengal, during 1996-1997. Further, the refinance requirements of small tea growers financed by State Cooperative Bank, State Co-operative Agriculture and Rural Development Bank and Regional Rural Banks of West Bengal will be met by NABARD in full.

Excise Duty on Railway Wagons

2662. SHRI SANAT KUMAR MANDAL : Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state :

(a) whether any request has been received from the Railway Ministry to waive the Central excise duty for private investors opting for the "own your wagon scheme";

(b) if so, the reaction of the Government thereon;

(c) whether the Railways, the main buyers of the wagons, do not pay central excise; and

(d) if so, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE AND MINISTER OF COMPANY AFFAIRS (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM) : (a) No request has been received from the Railway Ministry, in the recent past, to waive the Central excise duty for private investors opting for the "own your wagon scheme".

(b) Does not arise in view of (a) above.

(c) and (d). Indian Railways do not pay Central excise duty on wagons-bought, owned and intended to be used by them. The exemption has been given taking into account the public interest sub-served by the Railways.

[Translation]

Special Fund for Tribal Women

2663. SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE : Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state :

(a) whether Non-Governmental Organisations in meeting with the Minister of Finance had requested to set up a special fund for Tribal Women and NGOs engaged in development and plantation works; and

(b) if so, the reaction of the Government thereto?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE AND MINISTER OF COMPANY AFFAIRS (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM) : (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The relevant suggestions/deliberations made in the pre-budget meeting are carefully considered for the budgetary exercise.

[English]

Home Page to Indian Custom

2664. SHRI RAM NAIK : Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Government are aware that a home page for Indian Customs has been created in the Internal System;

(b) if so, whether as a result of above facility, a person residing abroad can tip off custom officials here about smuggling activities in India; and

(c) if so, the action taken/proposed to counter the above activities?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE AND MINISTER OF COMPANY AFFAIRS (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM) : (a) to (c). Yes, Sir. A home page has been created on the Internet giving, inter-alia, information regarding rules for giving rewards to persons who provide specific information about smuggling and duty evasion.

There already exist adequate legal and administrative arrangements to counter smuggling activities in India and they include provisions in law for confiscation of goods, imposition of fines and penalties and for prosecution of the concerned persons.

Foreign Investment

2665. SHRI SUSHIL CHANDRA : Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state :

(a) whether the developed nations and the World Bank/IMF have been insisting on further liberalisation of duties and lowering of interest rates for ensuring free flow of foreign investment in India and globalisation of economy;

(b) if so, whether the Government propose to resist such pressures for preventing extinction of domestic industries; and

(c) the steps taken by the Government to ensure that sudden cessation of activities or work by foreign companies in the infrastructure sector does not bring the country's development to a grinding halt?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE AND MINISTER OF COMPANY AFFAIRS (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM) : (a) and (b). Though developed countries and the world Bank/IMF do make suggestions about the macro-economic approach that India needs to pursue, there is no question of any external pressure determining the